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Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

Intrinsic dignity of the human person and the Millennium Development Goals

1. The recognition that all human beings have intrinsic dignity is the only foundation for human rights. It is the intrinsic worth of the human person that provides the basis on which to found policies and laws that create conditions under which human beings can flourish. Without such a foundation, human rights are articulated and enforced based upon the subjective preferences of those in power, thus undermining the entire human rights project and leading to violations of human rights.

2. The World Youth Alliance recognizes the necessity of educating and training women and girls in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We believe that recognizing the interdependent relationship between the development goals leads to their achievement. Every violation of human rights is an obstacle to the full achievement of the MDGs by 2015. In particular, women's lack of access to health care, shelter, education, participation and protection still hampers progress towards the MDGs.

3. Empowerment of women and girls brings about reduced family poverty, increased health and reduced child mortality. The opposite is true when the State does not invest in their health and education. Although there have been some successes, notably in Brazil — Bolsa Familia — and Mexico — Oportunidades — enrolment of girls in school is lower in developing countries than in developed countries.

4. The World Youth Alliance will analyse and propose improvements for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the light of the dignity of the human person. Specifically, we will address the relationship between education, development and poverty reduction as it relates to equality between women and men.

Access of women and girls to education

5. Millennium Development Goal 2 (Education) claims that children everywhere shall be able to achieve a full course of primary schooling. MDG 2 recognizes that education is a primary factor in overall human development. Achieving this development goal is especially important for girls, as education helps to reduce the risks of trafficking vulnerability, cycles of poverty through generations, rape and sexual exploitation.

6. Poverty, undernourishment and unemployment are the primary factors that prevent girls from finishing primary school. The lack of stability in developing countries' households forces girls and women to either work or marry early. By improving the situation of girl children living in poverty, deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, with no access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection, the dropout rates will be reduced. And, by eliminating school abandonment, the girl child will be empowered. There have been mechanisms in some developing countries such as Brazil which have implemented programmes that provide income support to poor families, subject to their having

* Issued without formal editing.

fulfilled certain human development requirements, such as child school attendance, participation in supplementary socio-educational activities, vaccinations, nutritional monitoring and prenatal and post-natal tests. These types of programmes, and other creative solutions, should be encouraged in all countries.

7. Early and forced marriage, as well as early sexual debut, hampers girls' access to education. Early pregnancy and childbearing are often impediments to improvements in the educational, economic and social status of women in all parts of the world. Early pregnancy and early motherhood can entail complications during pregnancy and childbirth. In developed and developing countries, the trend towards early sexual experience undermines efforts to fight HIV and other STIs. Forced marriage also has adverse physical and psychological effects on girls, when it includes threatening behaviour, abduction, imprisonment, physical and sexual violence, rape and even murder.

8. The World Youth Alliance stresses the importance of preventing all forms of violence against the girl child, including physical, mental, psychological and sexual violence. Occurring both in families and at school, torture, child abuse and exploitation, hostage-taking, domestic violence and paedophilia are all human rights violations in themselves, and, when experienced, further hinder girls' access to education and their human development. These problems will be solved through promoting the benefit of education both in families and at school and through the creation of appropriate, innovative, targeted programmes that go beyond the current legal frameworks to form and create awareness in girls, boys, parents, families, local communities, political, religious and traditional leaders and educational institutions.

9. It is well known that poverty eradication is not the only factor that will lower dropout rates for girls. In fact, this will be unachievable without first educating both boys and girls about equality and intrinsic dignity. Respect for the girl child's right to education starts at the earliest stages of life. Population policies that seek to control fertility inevitably lead to discrimination against the girl child through prenatal sex selection, sex-selective abortion and infanticide. In developed and developing countries, education to understand the intrinsic value of both women and men and to promote equal sharing of responsibilities, in both formal and informal work, should be encouraged. This education should focus on the inherent value of caregiving and other responsibilities that have typically been undertaken by women and girls, and that promote human flourishing, interconnectedness, and the basis for building strong families at the heart of society.

The role of the family in education

10. The World Youth Alliance affirms that the fundamental group unit of human society is the family, where women and men learn to live in genuine freedom and solidarity. Although the State has a duty to provide access to education, no institution can assume the role of the family as primary educator, because the biological and sociological ties between family members cannot be replicated. It is within the family that children first learn that they have intrinsic value, that responsibilities should be shared, and that human beings, no matter what their situation or condition, should be respected. The family prepares the individual to access society and is the place where individuals are equipped to fulfil their social obligations.

11. It is for these reasons that we believe the political community at the local, national and international levels is obliged to protect and nurture the family. The child has a right to be known and cared for by his or her parents, for instance, and so the State has the duty to create legal and political structures that encourage family unity. Studies[1] demonstrate that both father and mother are fundamental to the development of the human person and that human beings have a deep need to know the fullness of their identity. Therefore, the State must ensure that new reproductive technologies are regulated in a way that promotes full disclosure of ancestral history to children.

[1] Frank A. Pedersen, *The Father-Infant Relationship: Observational Studies in a Family Setting* (New York: Praeger, 1980); Michael W. Yogman, "Games Fathers and Mothers Play with Their Infants", *Infant Mental Health Journal* 2 (1981): 241-248; Paul Amato, "Father-Child Relations, Mother-Child Relations, and Offspring Psychological Well-Being in Early Adulthood", *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 56 (1994): 1031-1042; Cheryl Buehler, Mark J. Benson, and Jean M. Gerard, "Interparental Hostility and Early Adolescent Problem Behavior: The Mediating Role of Specific Aspects of Parenting", *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 16, No. 2 (2006): 265-292.